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POLAND, PRUSSIA AND CULTURE

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It is hardly necessary at the present moment to offer apologies for a pamphlet on the above subject. The war which is now going on has been proclaimed to be a struggle to free small nationalities from oppression; and Poland, in the early stages of the conflict, was singled out as one of those which were to be emancipated. A short account, therefore, of the life of this people may not be without interest for English and American readers; and a member of a nation hitherto oppressed and outraged may be permitted to remind the world of some part of her sufferings, as well as to give a few typical features of her present life.[1] The case for Poland need not be urged afresh. But the efforts which the Prussians are everywhere making to represent themselves as the champions of culture justify an account of the barbarities which they commit daily, and which are characteristic of their methods alike in peace and in war.

Prussia is the worst enemy of Poland. The best proof of that fact is to be seen in the present German character of the country east and north of Berlin, all of which was formerly Slavonic. For a long time past German colonizers have come into Russian Poland as a kind of advance guard of the *Drang nach Osten*. I should like

[1] The writer feels bound to acknowledge his debt of gratitude to his friends Mr. C. K. Allen and Mr. T. B. Kittredge for their assistance kindly given him by revising this pamphlet.

to remark here, that I am not going to treat of the complicated problems arising out of the relations between Poland and Russia : recriminations would be useless at this stage, and there is ample room for hope. But while in that direction we are met by an open problem, the question as to the relations between Prussia and Poland is definitely settled. A victorious Prussia would indeed mean a constant bar to the development of Poland, further oppression for Prussian Poland, and the Germanization of a large part of Russian Poland. Also let it be remembered, that whatever injustices Russia has committed against Poland have been universally known and condemned ; the deeds of Russian bureaucracy were even attributed to Russian society, despite the latter's higher ideals ; while Prussia, though guilty of more serious wrongs, has succeeded in making the world believe in her culture. That is why one would like to take an early opportunity of stating some hard facts about her vaunted humanity.

Comparatively few people in England are acquainted with the facts which I propose to discuss. I shall try, as one of a nation of over twenty millions, to state facts which I believe are matters of common knowledge to every member of that nation. At the same time, I wish to make it clear that I am speaking for nobody but myself, and that what I intend to say concerns either matters well known to everybody intimate with Polish affairs or personal impressions of conditions which each reader can verify for himself.

The inquiry will be twofold :

(1) What do the Poles stand for in their national culture ?

(2) What is the meaning, in point of culture, of the German hostility to the Poles ?

What do the Poles represent in civilization? Naturally it is difficult for a member of the nation in question to answer such a question. He may be accused of partiality and exaggeration, or he may overlook something of importance. The life of the Polish nation is too complex to admit of any short answer being given to the question I have proposed. I shall therefore confine my attention to one or two characteristic features of national development. The absence in England of reference-books with detailed statistics makes it difficult to give more than general indications.

First of all, in estimating the part played by Poland in the progress of civilization, one must remember her unfortunate position. A member of any nation with political independence can always work with one single purpose. In business, scholastic work, military service, he is always serving not only his own interest but his nation. Not so a Pole. Whatever new work he may take up, he must always remember that it is for him also to defend his national heritage against his enemies. Those enemies are armed; he is not. They control legislative bodies; he must obey their orders, or be treated as a revolutionary. They are powerful, and can make friends; he has nothing but what God has given him and what he can win for himself. At the very best, he is graciously allowed to enjoy a few of those rights which everywhere else are considered the birthright of man; but usually even that privilege is denied him. To understand Polish psychology, one must realize that two attitudes may be taken up in regard to Polish conditions. One is that of the cold chronicler, who simply records facts: to him, the Prussian Expropriation Law, the sufferings of children, the punishment of patriots, are merely items in a series of statutes, in

a treatise on pedagogy, in criminal statistics. But there is another and a more human point of view. You must yourself be able to feel deeply if you wish to understand what is felt, for instance, by an Austrian Pole, when he hears of the wrongs suffered by his compatriots in Prussian Poland. Unless you accept the evidence of those who have observed this people, unless you have been in Polish patriotic meetings, unless you have heard a national song sung secretly, with tears in the eyes—it is not easy to understand what the Polish spirit really means. And Poland of to-day is not a country of wealth and power which can reward her devoted sons with highly-paid positions and orders and titles. The Pole considers himself the son of a poor mother, whom he sees bound hand and foot, and whom he earnestly desires to make free and happy.

I should like to dispel at once a very common delusion, which arises from the oft-repeated calumnies of Poland's enemies. Polish patriots have often been represented as the sons or friends of a corrupt aristocracy, who desire a re-established Poland for their own selfish purposes. That view shows only a profound ignorance or a wilful misrepresentation of the life of the people. Polish patriotism is in the fullest sense a popular sentiment. Have the detractors forgotten that in the interval between the second and third partitions (1793–5) it was the peasants who took up—I was going to say arms, but alas! they had no arms: they took their scythes and turned them into swords—peasants, I repeat, who went into the field in thousands to face the enemy? Their leader was the famous Tadeusz Kosciuszko (*pron.* Kostewshko). It is said that the populations of boroughs were neglected or oppressed: was it not the heroic population of Warsaw, was it not a humble shoemaker (Kilinski) who

most nobly defended Polish liberty? Much, very much, may be said against some of Poland's former rulers; and many of her nobles have been far from guiltless. But does Poland stand alone in this respect? Was not the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German nation' torn by the struggles of petty princes and counts and barons? What of the Rhine Federation of 1806? The Polish burghers and peasants, one may say without exaggeration, fully understood that it was their country, and not any privileged class of their nation, which they so passionately defended. I do not mean to underestimate the great part played by the nobility in Polish history. Their mistakes were common mistakes of their times. But they were, and they still are, on the whole, as patriotic as any section of the community, and from their ranks have come some of the greatest of Poland's sons.

Austria attempted to counteract the revolutions of the 'forties by stirring up a peasant war against the nobility. (The condition of the peasantry, be it remembered, depended on, and could only be reformed by, the Austrian Government itself.) The attempt resulted only in a few outrages sanctioned by the Governments' benevolent neutrality; while the town of Lwów (*pron.* Lvooff) did revolt—but against the Government! At the same time a movement was being carried on in all parts of Poland, mostly against the Governments' wishes, to democratize the country. In 1848 the Poles were hailed as the champions of liberty in Berlin: they played a prominent part in the Austrian Constituent Assembly, which was suspended after a short time and superseded by a system of rigorous absolutism.

In spite of repeated prosecutions, the movement to popularize patriotic ideas, as well as to spread education among the poorer classes, was never suppressed. Advan-

tage was taken of every possible opportunity to carry on the propaganda; consider, for example, the development of schools in Galicia, where, to some extent at least, this function has of recent years been in the hands of Poles. We say to some extent; for the expenses had to be approved, directly or indirectly, by the Government, and only a few sources of revenue were available. It must be remembered that, down to the 'sixties, the Austrian Government had done its best to crush Polish patriotism, and had denied the Poles any effective part in the administration of their own affairs; the development of Galicia, therefore, must be considered as dating only from that time. Where, in any part of Poland, the Government attempted to repress Polish education, a system of 'illegal' teaching grew up. At the risk of imprisonment, Polish ladies would gather round them children of the poor, and do what in every other community would be considered not a crime but a work of charity—teach these children their own language and history. Coming home from their work, mothers would spend the evening in giving their children the cherished advantages they could not gain at school; for there it was a foreign language and history, not their own, which was offered them. Where it was lawful or, at all events, possible, students and others from the so-called 'intellectual' or educated classes would devote their spare time and much of their meagre income to the cause of enlightening Polish peasants and workmen, and assisting them in the struggle for their daily bread. To go out into the country, to lecture on some subject of general interest, in particular on Polish history, is the pride of many Poles. The system, though best organized in Galicia, is to be found throughout Poland. In Galicia, the Society of Popular

Schools (known familiarly as the T.S.L.) has branches in thousands of villages, and numerous organizations in the larger towns. Where the work already done by the local school is adequate, the branch contents itself with imparting elementary general knowledge to the peasants, developing their social life (there are, for instance, many amateur performances of music and drama), and instructing them in subjects of everyday utility; there is usually a small library; the local subscription is at most 1*s.* 8*d.* a year. Where local education is not efficient, or where none exists, schools are organized. In towns, *mutatis mutandis*, similar work is done. A number of other organizations exist which aim at the moral and physical development of the Pole.

Much the same is to be said of the economic development of the people. The Polish peasant, as well as the burgher or landlord, has been taught to understand that his national existence is closely connected with his economic strength. He is economically weakest where he is politically strongest—as in Galicia. Every political concession has been bought at the price of bearing a heavy economic yoke, which was imposed on Galicia as far back as the eighteenth century. From that time onwards Galicia has been a hinterland, and even her liberation from German imposts was obstructed by the Austrian Government as much as possible. Where 'iron war' is being relentlessly waged on them, the Polish peasant and burgher adopt the only weapon which is left to them—that of economic organization: Polish industrial enterprise was carried on in Prussia against the will of the Government, which on the other hand lent all its assistance to German trade. Yet the Poles managed to augment their national wealth, much to the exasperation of German economists. No statute,

no *Landrat*, no police, were powerful enough to check this development. Law after law was passed, Pole after Pole was ill-treated, *Landrats* were constantly changed: but still the nation grew from strength to strength. And when the most drastic steps were taken by the authorities, the Poles replied by organizing a boycott of all German goods as well as of all Germans imported by the Government to aid in Germanizing the country.

One of the best evidences of the democratic character of Poland's economic development is the vigorous growth of co-operative societies. In all three parts of the country these societies have rapidly spread, and at present are conspicuously worthy of study and imitation. Whenever an opportunity presents itself of carrying on this movement by legal methods, they are extended in all directions, so that there is now a perfect network of societies out of which larger and larger units are gradually formed. The best known are the 'Farmers' Circles', which exist in almost every village.

The boycott, to which I have just referred, is used by the Poles as a defensive weapon against German aggression. Russian Poland has been for many years flooded with German colonists. Prussian Poland is, in fact, regarded by the Prussian Government as a kind of promised land for Germans instead of Poles. Since the Prussian Government began to increase its persecutions of the Poles—at the same time assisting Germans with every kind of encouragement—a boycott has been organized against German tradesmen in Prussian Poland, and against all German produce in Russian and Austrian Poland. The movement is taken up with unbounded enthusiasm by young and old alike. I have seen school-children going from shop to shop, asking for articles such as pens, paper, &c., and reporting to the Press or the

' boycott organizations ' [1] the names of traders who had offered German, or even ' suspected ' goods. It must be remembered that the Poles can nowhere employ the weapon of tariffs ; for instance, goods brought from Warsaw to Cracow are often subject to heavier duties than those coming from Berlin. Needless to say, the Germans used every possible ruse to circumvent the watchful boycotters, while they compelled the Prussian Poles to give a large measure of publicity to their business. Notwithstanding their efforts, the work was done thoroughly and well.

The political struggle for existence could do much to make life difficult for the Poles ; but it did not entirely absorb the attention of the nation. It did not exclude a strong, though hampered, cultural life. It is hardly necessary to remind my readers of world-famous names like those of Mme. Curie-Sklodowska the scientist, Sienkiewicz the novelist, or Paderewski the musician. But I may be allowed to add that they are by no means accidents of national life and character. The work of culture is carried on unceasingly. The Germans, with their sixty millions, have more than twenty universities ; the ten millions of German Austrians have five ; the Poles, with over twenty millions, have—two ! In these two, it is true, there is no branch of human knowledge which is not taught. Still, the numbers speak for themselves. There are many Polish scholars of great eminence—though unfortunately they are often taken for foreigners ! It happens only too frequently that the results of Polish academic labour are appropriated by

[1] A body of this kind exists in Lwów under the name of ' Organization of Boycott of Goods coming from Prussia and the German Empire ', and had, when I was last in that city, its own publication, called *Bojkot*.

the learned pretences of others. Hence the desire of many Poles to write in no language but their own; hence, also, the fact that so few people in England are acquainted with the work of a scholar (to name only one) who should be well known to anybody who is interested in Polish or Slavonic legal history—I refer to Professor Balzer, of the University of Lwów. There are many others equally zealous, if not equally illustrious. To the excellent academic work which is being done much is contributed by the numerous learned societies and their publications. There is a special society devoted to the promotion of nearly every branch of knowledge. Here again the smallest actual result is achieved in Prussia, where every nerve is strained and every faculty engaged in defending what remains of national property. Where the pressure of material conditions is not so severe, intellectual work goes on without pause, the central control being vested in the Polish Academy, whose numerous publications may be found in more than one English library.

It must always be borne in mind that all this work is carried on with, at most, comparatively slight assistance from the Government. Generally it receives no assistance at all and has to contend with the greatest difficulties. It should be clearly understood who is chiefly responsible for this work. It may be interesting to note that the Polish learned community (whatever its varying political sympathies) is to a large extent of democratic origin.[1] The same is true of the students. Many of them, sons of poor farm-labourers, come up to

[1] There are, of course, many distinguished scholars of noble descent, e. g. Count Tarnowski, the President of the Academy; the late Count Dzieduszycki; Count Pininski; Professor Starzynski, the late Rector of Lwów University, and others.

the university and work six or more hours a day just to earn their scanty livelihood. It is not uncommon to find among them men who even contrive to send a little money to support an aged mother or help to send a brother to school. The time left over from that which is spent in earning a living is devoted to university work, or even to work in some society which helps to provide education for the poor.[1] I have seen many examples of this kind in my own university. Of course, some attempt has been made to give assistance to those who have to struggle against such difficulties. 'Societies of fraternal help' have been organized, and are doing admirable work in the universities. 'University houses,' which provide cheap lodgings, have also been built. The principle of national self-help is applied wherever possible.

A characteristic and curious feature of Polish culture is the peasant-poets. They are not merely isolated cases; they are very popular—not least among their fellow peasants. One of their number, a member of the Reichsrat and the Galician Diet, some time ago by accident lost his seat in the Diet. The city of Lwow offered him a seat, and he was elected after a campaign lasting only a few days. The works of these poets are not treated as mere curiosities, but accepted as expressions of those feelings which are not only characteristic of the Polish mind but common to humanity at large. In this connexion mention should be made of the Polish patriotic songs. They form a group by themselves; there are hundreds of them, expressing those sentiments of hope and fear

[1] The poverty of most Polish students is incredible. An inquiry organized a few years ago by a personal friend of mine, Dr. Zylski, has revealed the most appalling conditions.

and love and sorrow which ever since the last quarter of the eighteenth century have filled the hearts of all true Poles. Though generally composed by obscure authors, they are known everywhere throughout the country. There is no great event in Polish history, no battle of the revolutions,[1] no famous case of persecution, which is not commemorated by its own song. From the period of the Napoleonic wars up to the present time, collections of these songs have been owned by many Poles, and the utmost persecution has not been able to make them surrender these treasured possessions.

In the quality and output of their literature the Poles may claim, I think, that they are not behind any other nation of the present day. There are so many writers in different branches of literary activity that it is difficult to give any accurate or even approximate account of their productions. Prus-Glowacki tells in a brilliant novel the story of a Polish peasant in Russian Poland who is beset by German colonists eager to snatch his land and ready to employ every means to ruin the heroic defender of his ancestral land. The poetess Mme. Konopnicka sings of village life, while her friend Mme. Orzeszkowa leads a vigorous attack on social superstitions. The poet of radicalism, Zeromski, places his hero amid the events which in Napoleonic times filled Poland with conflicting emotions, and pictures the development of his mind from early youth to mature manhood. Tetmajer, a son of the Polish highlands, sings their beauty and the life-story of their sons and daughters. Village life is faithfully described by Reymont; Ujejski's illustration of Chopin's *Marche Funèbre* lends a new beauty to that famous work; Asnyk, social reformer as

[1] There was a time when even German poets, like Lenau, sang of Polish patriotism.

well as singer of love-songs; Mme. Zapolska, whose fascinating novels expose with a strong realism social vice and hypocrisy—these are only a few names taken at random from many.

What has been said may give some impression of Polish civilization—an impression which, I feel sure, does not err on the side of exaggeration. I have tried, except for one or two minor references, to confine myself to what has been done in the last decades of the nineteenth and first years of the twentieth centuries; there are large fields of successful Polish activity, especially in the fine arts (e.g. in painting the works of Grottger, Siemiradzki, Matejko, and so many others) to which I have not referred. I have purposely refrained from going further back and from mentioning Poland's three greatest poets, as well as others of her famous sons and daughters. I hope that I have said enough to show that this nation is worthy of the assistance of other nations who stand for civilization and culture. There is surely no need to plead that she is entitled to *existence and independence*: my intention is merely to show that her inward life has been so vigorous, in spite of all difficulties, that in helping her more powerful nations will be helping the cause of culture and humanity. Can the same be said of Prussia? That leads us to the question, What is the meaning, from the point of view of culture, of the struggle between Germans and Poles?

There are three arguments which are generally put forward whenever the Germans, and more especially the Prussians, set themselves to subdue a smaller nation: they are—(1) The racial struggle: (2) The defence of culture: (3) Example. As to the racial struggle, it is usually carried on against Slavs, sometimes against Latins;

but the struggle itself is not necessarily confined to those races, for Prussia has not hesitated to oppress Teutonic Danes. Moreover, until quite recently, the Prussian ruling classes would have repudiated any idea of relenting their persecution of the Poles 'lest Russia might be alienated'.[1] Frederick II and Frederick William II did not mind combining with Russia to carry out the partitions of Poland. But wherever possible the 'racial struggle' serves as an excuse and a catchword. Usually some person of weight and authority comes forward to urge upon the German world the necessity of carrying on the struggle. To mention only one example: it was no other than Theodor Mommsen who, seventeen years ago, considered it his duty to stir up Austrian Germans against the Slavs, the majority in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy being Slavonic. He received a spirited reply from a distinguished Pole in the person of Professor Balzer.[2] The great German historian had to be reminded that, when the Germans overran the Roman Empire, they had not the slightest solicitude for the civilization of the conquered country, and did not keep back on account of their own barbarism: that it was a poet of his own nation, Schiller, who said, 'There is room on earth for everybody.' What would a German say, asked Professor Balzer, if he were charged with being less civilized, say by a Frenchman or Italian, merely because German culture began comparatively late and for long was based on foreign, especially French and Italian, models? But the lesson apparently was not enough for Prussia. On every possible pretext th.

[1] See *The Times*, December 30, 1901, p. 3, col. *f*.

[2] Professor of Polish Legal History in the University of Lwow, Member of the Polish and Bohemian Academies, and Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy.

'holy war' is still preached. A nation which is not German is, it would seem, destined only for the hostility of the Teutonic peoples.

Two other arguments are particularly dear to the Germans: they are fighting for civilization, and they are setting a profitable example to the world. No deed so barbarous which may not be justified on one or other of these grounds. Such arguments are particularly prominent in the struggle against the Poles. The Kaiser once stated, in Gniezno, that 'the name of German connotes civilization and freedom for all in religion as well as in thought and activity'.[1] I should like, therefore, to give some slight account of one or two of the most glorious achievements of Prussian culture in Poland. I shall try for the most part to confine myself to the twentieth century.[2] I must add that what I am about to say does not pretend in the slightest degree to be a full account of the immense tragedies which are the fate of millions of Poles in Prussia. Comparatively few of them are even ever reported: their occurrence is a fact of daily life in Poland and there is no necessity to repeat what everybody knows and feels.

It is difficult to know where to begin. But we may take as a first example the case of the Polish schoolboys in 1901. Some sixty of them were tried on a charge of

[1] *The Times*, August 11, 1905, p. 3, col. *f*.

[2] As a rule I shall refer to accounts published in *The Times*. Where that is impossible, the references are to Buzek's *Historya polityki narodowosciowej rzadu pruskiego wobec Polaków* (*History of the Nationalist Policy of the Prussian Government against the Poles*), Lwów, 1909. The work covers the period 1815–1908. Dr. Buzek is Professor of Administrative Law in the University of Lwów, and member of the Reichsrat and was chairman of its Committee for Social Insurance. A copy of his book is in the British Museum.

belonging to a 'secret society'; out of the number nearly fifty were convicted and sentenced, some of them to three months' imprisonment. The dark and dangerous purpose of this criminal confederacy was 'the study of the Polish language, literature, and history'. A still more heinous offence, in the eyes of the Court, was that the society was intended 'to promote the revival of Polish national feeling'.[1] The boys were sent to prison, to be instructed in the virtues of civilization—to learn, in the Kaiser's words, 'freedom in thought and activity'. Even this privilege was not considered sufficient. According to Professor Buzek's account, the boys, besides being imprisoned, were expelled from their schools—some of them, indeed, precluded from all the higher schools in Prussia. Their crime was manifestly greater than that of the German schoolboys who formed secret drinking societies, and who before that time had been disciplined only by the school authorities.[2]

The boys had not yet served their sentences when certain Poles were guilty of another and an equally odious crime. The Germans had, in the second half of the nineteenth century, abolished teaching in Polish. Attendance at school is compulsory: and Polish children therefore had to read and learn everything in German. Only by the most heroic efforts could their parents find time to teach them Polish writing: but they contrived to do so, in spite of all obstacles. Religious instruction was the only subject which could be taught in Polish in the schools—and that only here and there,[3] not by any

[1] *The Times*, September 11, 1901, p. 3, col. *d*; September 14, 1901, p. 6, col. *c*. Note that in 1815 the King of Prussia in his proclamation assured the Poles that 'they need not give up their nationality'.

[2] Buzek, p. 487. [3] *The Times*, October 30, p. 5, 1906, col. *d*.

means universally. Wherever they could do so, the Germans substituted their own language for Polish, even in the teaching of religion. It happened that in Wrzesnia (in German, Wreschen) certain children 'refused to pay any attention to religious instruction imparted in the German language'. They said simply, 'We are Poles, not Germans, and do not wish to know anything about the German religion'. Some twenty of them, therefore, were 'detained, and, on their still proving obdurate', fourteen of their number received 'corporal punishment'.[1] Speaking of this incident in the Landtag, the Prussian Minister of Public Instruction said: 'the teacher had merely enforced a pedagogic principle, the excellence of which had been proved for two thousand years.'[2] But the barbarous Poles could not perceive the excellence of the principle nor the superiority of a German to a Polish prayer. The punishment inflicted on the children 'led to a great uproar among the parents and friends of the children, some of whom succeeded in forcing their way into the school, while the punishment was being administered, and were only expelled by the aid of the police'.[3] A physician, Dr. Krzyzagorski, certified that the children's fingers were so swollen that they could not close their hands.[4] 'For the violence then displayed, and for opprobrious and seditious language towards the inspector and the other school authorities,' twenty-five persons were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment[5]—one of them, a mother of five children to two and a half years.

[1] *The Times*, November 20, 1901, p. 5, cols. *d*, *e*.
[2] Ibid., January 14, 1902, p. 3, col. *e*.
[3] Ibid., November 20, 1901, p. 5, col. *e*.
[4] Buzek, p. 467.
[5] *The Times*, November 20, 1901, p. 5, col. *e*.

It was after these highly cultured proceedings that Henryk Sienkiewicz, the author of *Quo Vadis?* addressed an open letter to (if I remember aright) the Kaiser. I may be permitted to quote from it at some length, for the reader will find in it, I think, an expression of what many must be feeling to-day:

. . . Not a hand had been raised against the master executioners. Not a single deed of violence had been perpetrated. And yet the Prussian Courts of Justice condemned the parents of those poor children who had been tortured in the Prussian schools, because, moved by despair and pity, they allowed words of indignation to escape their lips against such schools and such masters. . . . We . . who, since a fraction of our nation has formed part of Prussia, are well acquainted with that *milieu*, we alone have no right to be surprised . . . One of their own authors, a German, once expressed the characteristic opinion that it was a mistake to think that an immoral policy did not deprave society and its future generations. What was bound to happen did happen. Ever since the time of Frederick II and even a still more remote period, Prussian policy has been but a series of crimes, of deeds of violence, of knavery, of humility towards the powerful, of tyranny towards the weak, of falsehoods, of violated treaties, of broken promises.

That is not only the opinion of foreign historians, but it is also that of independent German historians themselves. How, then, can we be surprised that in such circumstances a decomposition of souls should follow, that the sentiment of justice and truth should have degenerated, that moral sense should have completely disappeared, and that in the midst of the general depravity the school should have become an instrument of torture and the debased Courts of Justice the tools of savage instincts and of violence? . . . The only consolation in all this is that it cannot last. . . . Christian and cultured nations cannot submit to barbarism for any length of time. Nor can the German people be for

ever subjected to the Prussian element. . . . The future must bring, and unquestionably will bring, expiation and a gigantic evolution.[1]

At that time the Kaiser was talking about sculpture, the relation of art to nature, and ideals. 'For us,' he said, 'for the German people, great ideals have become permanent possessions, while other nations have more or less lost them.'[2]

The case of Wrzesnia, of course, aroused a storm of indignation among the Poles. The German Government did its utmost to force her Austrian ally to prevent the Galician Poles from openly condemning Prussia; and the notorious Prince Eulenburg, then German ambassador at Vienna, had to exert himself very energetically to put down these scandalous Polish assaults on Prussian culture.[3]

Without tracing in detail the further development of this question, I will point out only one significant fact. Those 'wicked boys', as an influential Berlin journal described them, had been punished; but the 'example' was not sufficient. The series of tragedies continued. In 1906, M. H. de Noussaine, of the *Écho de Paris*, published a letter which had been addressed to him, undertaking at the same time to furnish the Prussian authorities with names and details. I will give a few extracts:

The Prussian Government persists in endeavouring to give religious instruction in German to the Polish children in most of the schools. . . . The children and their parents, above all among the working classes, are determined to resist this abuse of power. Hundreds

[1] *The Times*, November 29, 1901, p. 5, col. *e*.
[2] Ibid., December 20, 1901, p. 3, cols. *c*, *d*.
[3] Ibid., December 6, 1901, p. 5, col. *c*.

of children have spontaneously declared to their teachers that they will not use a single word of German. They persist in their refusal in spite of being beaten and locked up in the dark. They can be seen in tears, begging the priests to pray to God to have pity upon their sufferings. . . . The school teachers and the Government are exasperated, and persecute both parents and children in an unheard-of fashion. The children are locked up, not even being allowed to return to their homes for dinner. In many schools the teachers have flogged the children until they lost consciousness.[1]

The result was that nearly fifty thousand children throughout Prussian Poland 'went on strike'.[2] They refused 'to answer questions in German in the religious instruction classes, preferring to be kept in and even to be flogged'.[3] The Prussian Government faced this shameful revolt with 'calmness and deliberation', as was semi-officially announced; in other words, it enumerated the draconic penalties which it proposed to inflict on rebellious parents and children.[4] Is it necessary to add that they carried out their intention? Nevertheless, the number of the 'strikers' steadily increased, until it reached a hundred thousand. The Government employed all the coercive methods it had threatened, and many others besides. Thus, under a rule that parents are punishable for the non-attendance of their children at school, many parents were penalized, on the ground that by their disobedience the children were 'absent in spirit'. In some fifty cases, brothers of the children involved were expelled from the public school (*gymnasium*), for the sons of parents who taught their children to disobey the authorities were

[1] *The Times*, October 12, 1906, p. 3, cols. *e*, *f*.
[2] Ibid., November 2, 1906, p. 3, col. *b*.
[3] Ibid., October 27, 1906, p. 7, col. *b*.
[4] Ibid., November 2, 1906, p. 3, col. *b*

thought likely to exercise a bad influence over their fellows.[1]

A short time before these events a member of the Pan-German party had advocated the religious instruction in their native language of the Hereros of South-West Africa.[2] The same privilege was not considered fitting for the Polish nation.

The case of the children is not unique, nor even the most glaring of many others which might be cited. Let us take another example. In 1908 an imperial statute enacted that, except in international congresses, only the German language could be used in public meetings. An exception was made in the case of districts where at least 60 per cent. of the population had always been accustomed to use the native tongue. If, therefore, a Pole who has been expropriated by the Commission and who is unable to buy land, goes, let us say, to Westphalia, he cannot speak Polish in a public meeting; and the presence of 41 per cent. of Germans in any particular district of Poland makes it a crime to speak the Polish language in public meetings. And even where it is permissible to do so, the privilege is only temporary, for it extends only to 1928: and the restrictions and conditions imposed are, to any reasonable mind, intolerable.[3]

For many years it has been the established practice of the Government not to appoint any Polish officials or civil servants in the Polish provinces. Those who were admitted before this prohibition came into operation, or who agreed to serve in other parts, are subject to many restrictions. While engaged in their official

[1] Buzek, p. 474.

[2] *The Times*, December 7, 1906, p. 5, col. *c*.

[3] S. 12 of the *Reichsvereinsgesetz*, 1908; as to other points of the Law of Association, cf. *The Times*, February 7, 1914, p. 7, col. *c*.

duties, for example, they must not use a single word of Polish. In 1898 the authorities of Gdansk ordered that every schoolmaster should be answerable to the Government if members of his family spoke Polish in private life.[1]

The perfidy which characterizes the struggle is, if possible, even greater than its brutality. The Poles are German subjects; in fact, in matters such as conscription or taxes, they are Germans. But they are Poles—and enemies—whenever there is an opportunity to violate their rights. The references made to the Poles by ministers in Parliament are invariably contemptuous or insulting. Singing the Polish anthem is now, of course, a crime. Yet in the Franco-Prussian War, Prussian generals ordered it to be played when Polish conscripts were sent to the attack. On one occasion the president of a Polish society was prosecuted and convicted, because on one of the society's excursions some Polish songs were sung. The Public Prosecutor admitted that the words were harmless, but held that the melody was likely to provoke a breach of the peace.[2]

The same policy does not shrink from encouraging immorality if it suits its ends to do so. Only recently there was considerable discussion in the Prussian Diet about a white slave trader in a Polish town, who was granted immunity by the police because he was doing useful service as a political agent.[3]

Out of the taxes paid by Poles, as well as by others, a 'settlement commission' was established in the 'eighties

[1] Buzek, p. 513.

[2] Judgement of the Court at Grudziadz, April 29, 1905; Buzek, p. 527.

[3] A part of this case is stated in *The Times*, February 21, 1914, p. 8, col. c

to promote German colonization in Polish districts. The commissioners paid high prices, encouraged Poles to sell their land, and subjected those who were unwilling to do so to all kinds of disabilities. But they met with little success; and in the year 1908 an Expropriation Act was passed, in open violation of the German Imperial Constitution, and as another shining example of Prussian civilization. In the Polish provinces, where the interests of *Deutschtum* require it, the Settlement Commission could effect the expropriation of the landowner in order to make room for German colonists. The first case under this enactment was that of a Polish widow with two children. The land had been owned by her husband's ancestors for an exceedingly long time; but the tenant was ruthlessly evicted to make way for the grasping Prussian.

The Expropriation Act can be employed for many purposes. It was primarily intended to enable the Commission to acquire land, since the Poles refused to sell a 'satisfactory' quantity of it. It was also intended to ruin as many Polish landowners as possible: and therefore the compensation given is assessed according to a semi-official estimate—much lower, of course, than the actual value of the land. When the proprietors sold voluntarily, they could ask only a sacrifice price, for they knew that the Commission might at ny moment step in and offer even less. Conversely, if a Pole wishes to buy land, he is unable to offer a price as high as would be asked of and could be paid by German purchasers, for his tenure is never secure from the Commissioners, and he is always liable to be called on to sell at a loss.

I should add that the Government spares no pains to make the methods of its officials as vexatious as possible

to all Poles who are true to their nationality. A special bonus (Ostmarkenzulage) in addition to their salary is awarded at the discretion of the Government to its officers in Prussian Poland in proportion to the zeal which they display in the discharge of their duties. The reader may judge for himself what kind of 'zeal' such a system is likely to inspire in the Government's 'publicans and sinners'.

Sufficient has been said, I hope, to provide an answer to the questions I asked at the beginning of this pamphlet. The reader of the facts I have stated may find himself able to agree with Professor Balzer's words:

To a great part of the German peoples, the interests of culture have always been associated with the State interest, i.e. the State interest has been in the first place. They carried civilization to the Slavonic East to gain for themselves political advantages, and they did not hesitate to give up the cause of culture wherever their own egoistic political interests required some sacrifice. Politicians and Germanizers, in a higher degree than civilizers, they perpetually identified the idea of culture with the idea of their own State and their own nationality; they believed and wished to persuade the world—they even wanted the world to believe them—that the way to civilization leads only through Germany, and that there can be no better fortune for other peoples than to attain by that way to greater perfection. They proclaimed themselves chosen guardians of all who began to engage in the pursuits of culture later than themselves, without asking whether those others desired such guardianship, without reflecting that they could work for culture independently, having been endowed by God with the same abilities as Germans. . . . The Germans offered culture to the Slavs, usually at the price of their giving up the greatest treasure, their own nationality: where the Slavs would not pay that price, the Germans simply obstructed their independent development and did not allow them to carry on the work of civilization.

. . . German culture is neither the first, nor the last, nor the only culture which leads to perfection. . . .'

May I, in conclusion, suggest to the reader one lesson among the many which will come out of the present great struggle? When the war is over, however much of promise and hope it may ultimately mean for Poland, she will undoubtedly be left in a condition of tragic desolation and misery. But every endeavour will be immediately used to make good her enormous losses; Europe will have learned that no great Power can safely allow a weaker nation to be oppressed, for the crimes committed against one people, if left unpunished, are likely to be repeated against others; and it may be hoped that people in the West will look at Poland through their own, and not 'through German eyes'. If the Western nations will try to come into closer contact with their Eastern friends, they will find much of interest, much that they will consider worth knowing and perhaps admiring. They will find a civilization which has grown up without the aid of militarism, and a principle of national solidarity and self-reliance combined with respect for individual rights. Above all, they will find true, devoted, and patriotic hearts. Perhaps they will see less wealth and material power than elsewhere: but they will also see less hypocrisy and more sterling humanity.

Oxford: Horace Hart Printer to the University

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